

Wallis Annenberg center for the Performing Arts / SPF:a

12:30 - 21 March, 2010 by [Sebastian Jordana](#)

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March 11 marked the groundbreaking celebration at the historic [Beverly Hills](#) Post Office for the new Wallis Annenberg center for the Performing Arts, designed by [Studio Pali Fekete architects \(SPF:a\)](#). The historic building will be restored and adapted, and the spaces that were once used for mail sorting and postage purchases will be redesigned to become a theater school, a flexible studio theater, sculpture garden, café, gift shop and more. Complimenting the historic building will be the 500-seat contemporary Goldsmith Theater.

More images, a video, and architect's description after the break.

At one point, prior to [SPF:a](#)'s involvement in the project, conventional wisdom was to place the new performing arts venue within the walls of the historic post office building, and to create a small annex on the site to house the educational components of the program. [SPF:a](#) did the reverse – instead, the studio took the smaller programmatic elements such as the rehearsal hall, classrooms, and administrative offices and located them into the three level historic building, where they fit nicely and snugly. This preserves and celebrates the historic architecture, as well as affords the Center the opportunity to create a new, state-of-the-art, flexible performing arts facility with ample back-of-house amenities.

The plan diagram of the new theater is a “T”, as is the historic building. By turning the new “T” so that it fits on the site adjacent the existing one, a dynamic site diagram evolves. The interplay between buildings also forms a series of serene outdoor gardens and courtyards that allow for a variety of activities and landscapes, including a pathway that will allow visitors to walk from City Hall through the site towards the shopping areas. Each interior space of the complex has a corresponding exterior plaza or garden that extends the space into the public domain and takes advantage of the southern California climate.



Rather than imitate or pay homage to the existing architecture, the new interventions on the site celebrate the history of the site itself, and the activity that took place there: the processing, sorting, and delivery of mail. Thus the project is essentially a collection of wrappers, envelopes, and surfaces that weave together a diverse set of functions and itineraries.

The skin of the new Goldsmith Theater is an abstraction of the millions of letters and envelopes that once defined this historic site – formed in copper-colored concrete panels. A 4 foot by 9 foot envelope-shaped panel is repeated across the façade. The result is a beautiful abstract textural pattern, engraved into a copper skin. Each envelope is slightly different; some flat, some closed, some open, some turned front side out, and some turned to their backs. The direction not only creates symbolism in its architecture, but an abstract composition and a piece of art.



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The skin folds in response to the street and existing building on the site. The skin also conceals the mechanical equipment of the building. As it wraps around the building it modulates its construction to create a cohesive figure out of the building masses that otherwise would be perceived as separate elements.

What was once a hub of private personal communication becomes a center for art and education. In doing so, the Center embodies the invisible monumentality of the process of mail distribution, creating a resonance with its new function as a center for the processing and distribution of culture.



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“We have a stunning design from Zoltan Pali,” said Wallis Annenberg Center’s Executive Director Lou Moore. “Our Board of Directors has been working very closely with Pali throughout each phase. We applaud the team’s efforts and diligence in insuring that this design meets the expectations of our donors, neighbors and the entire community.”

The site is rich with lush greenery and serene gardens designed by Ron Lutsko and Associates. The expansive Promenade Terrace will be perfect for casual dining and special events. It will transition dramatically into the Sculpture Garden via a cascade of terraced steps, bringing audiences into the Goldsmith Theater.

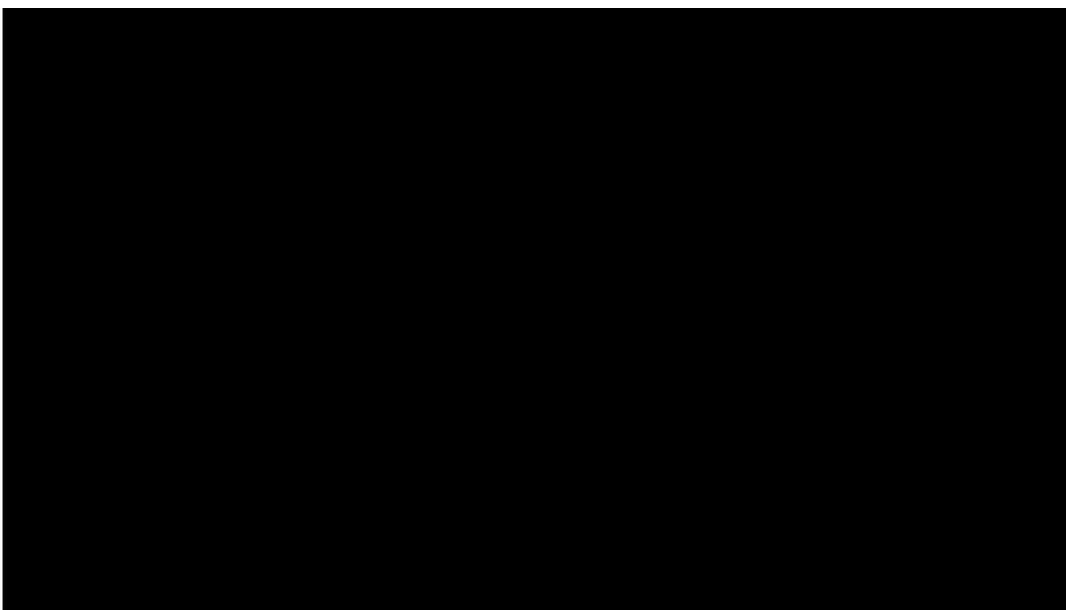


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A City of [Beverly Hills](#) three-level subterranean parking garage is being built underneath the adjacent Crescent Drive, to provide additional parking for the City and serve Annenberg patrons.

Only steps away from the “Golden Triangle” of [Beverly Hills](#), patrons will be able to combine their theater experience with world class dining and shopping at the soon-to-be built Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.



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